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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) appreciates the opportunity to participate in the thirty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development and to speak on behalf of older persons worldwide. AARP is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, with a membership of 32 million persons.

Our comments today focus on the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the recognition of each individual's rights in their society. Paragraph 66 of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development describes the aim of social integration as creating a society for all, "in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. Such an inclusive society must be based on respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, democratic participation and the rule of law. The pluralistic nature of most societies has at times resulted in problems for the different groups to achieve and maintain harmony and cooperation, and to have equal access to all resources in society. Full recognition of each individual's rights in the context of the rule of law has not always been fully guaranteed. Since the founding

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of the United Nations, this quest for humane, stable, safe, tolerant and just societies has shown a mixed record at best".

In support of this aim, and in recognition of every individual's rights, AARP is pleased to present a compilation of writing from older persons around the world on the subject of human rights.* It was initiated to celebrate the dual occurrences of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, and the 1999 International Year of Older Persons. We offer it to the Commission for Social Development on behalf of older persons worldwide in the spirit of promoting the principle of caring for one another's well-being and fostering the spirit of mutual support, within with context of human rights education (Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, para. 70).

The writings were selected from over 400 participants in a global postcard campaign among older persons, eliciting their views on the meaning of human rights, particularly from the vantage point of late life. The photographs on the postcards correspond to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and were chosen to illustrate that, in a society for all ages, older persons have human rights the same as all other age groups.

Individuals from over 40 countries participated, returning the postcards in their own handwriting and language. The responses range from random thoughts and introspection, to poetry and solemn prose. Some persons were light-hearted and pleased to participate, some expressed hopelessness and despair, and others assembled extraordinary packages of personal pictures, essays, gift books, cards and posters. Only a small number of the postcards could be included in this booklet, but efforts to exhibit all of the postcards more widely will be made throughout the International Year of Older Persons.

The lead agency on this project was AARP, working in collaboration with the United Nations programme on ageing, and with the participation of several project partners, including Coalition 99, HelpAge International, the Geneva International Network on Ageing (GINA), the NGO Committees on Ageing in Vienna and in New York, the International Movement ATD Fourth World, and regional and local programmes of AARP.

We urge Governments to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms for persons of all ages, including the right to development, bearing in mind the interdependent and mutually reinforcing relationship between democracy, development and respect for human rights (para. 71, Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development), and to join us in speaking out on behalf of ageing.

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* Available in the files of the Secretariat.